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# CURRENT LITERATURE

## BOOK REVIEWS

### The trees of California

Recent years have witnessed a national awakening to the great importance of forestry, and this in turn has excited a new interest in the trees themselves. People wish to learn something about them, their characteristics, how to distinguish one from another, and their proper names, so that there is an evident demand for books which shall impart this knowledge, not only in a form suited to botanists and technical students, but to any intelligent reader. Too often, however, in the effort to treat a scientific subject in a popular way, the science is so attenuated as to be practically valueless. Fortunately, DR. JEPSON, in supplying California with what is really a popular *Sylva* of the state,<sup>1</sup> has not fallen into this error. On the contrary, in his keys and descriptions he has adhered strictly to the methods of systematic botany, but so far as possible he has simplified them, and has made no unnecessary use of technical terms.

The first fifty pages are devoted to a number of somewhat detached papers, relating to the characteristics of various tree groups, a consideration of the forest distribution in different parts of the state, and other pertinent topics. A section on "second-growth circles" is of much interest. These circles result, as is well known, from stump sprouts, and the author here considers the extent to which various species of Californian trees possess this valuable regenerative power. The redwood possesses it to a preeminent degree, and the author holds that 80 per cent of the adult trees in a redwood forest originated from stump sprouts, and not from seeds; while some of the circles must have begun their existence more than 1000 years ago.

Of equal interest is the discussion of the relation of periodic fires to the native trees. Such fires are held to have exerted a selective effect on the forest growth, due to the degree of resistance to fire possessed by different trees. In this ability, again, the redwood surpasses all others. For unnumbered centuries it was the custom of the Californian Indians periodically to burn over the country, a habit which appears to have been universal among the aborigines, from the Atlantic to the Pacific. References to it are frequent in the accounts of early settlers and explorers. Perhaps the earliest is that of THOMAS MORTON, in "New English Canaan," published in 1637, where he describes such a custom among the Indians of Massachusetts, and the passage is worth quoting. "The salvages," he writes, "are accustomed to set fire to the country in all places where they come, and to

<sup>1</sup> JEPSON, WILLIS LINN, *The trees of California*. pp. 228. *photogravures* 34. *text figs.* 91. San Francisco: Cunningham, Curtis, and Welch. 1910.

burn it twize a year, viz., at the spring, and the fall of the leafe. The reason that mooves them to doe so is because it would otherwise be so overgrowne with underweedes that it would be all a coppice-wood, and the people would not be able in any wise to passe through the country out of a beaten path. This custom hath bin continual from the beginning." Too little account has been taken of the selective effect of such burning, "from the beginning," on the vegetation of our country, and DR. JEPSON has done well in devoting some pages to a consideration of its influence on the trees of California.

The second and larger part of DR. JEPSON's volume is given to systematic descriptions of the different trees, with the necessary keys for the guidance of the reader to their identification. Both keys and descriptions are satisfactory to the botanist, while not presenting difficulties too great for anyone of fair education and mental ability. The full notes on distribution, economic uses, and cognate topics add much to the interest of the book, whose value is further enhanced by the numerous and excellent figures in the text.—S. B. PARISH.

#### The trees of Kentucky

There is no more expeditious way to interest people generally in trees and thus promote the conservation of forests than by issuing well-illustrated, non-technical handbooks on the trees of the various states. Thus there is stimulated local pride in the particular trees and forests of any section. One of the neatest and most satisfactory of such handbooks, dealing with the trees of Kentucky, has just appeared.<sup>2</sup> Few states have a more diversified tree flora than Kentucky, which in its eastern portion has a representative development of the Alleghany forests, while in the west there is found a northern extension of the characteristic trees of the Lower Mississippi. The trees are arranged in modern fashion, and there are many excellent photographic reproductions showing leaf, bark, or fruit characters, with a smaller number of full-page plates showing field habits and habitats. The descriptions are particularly good, since the chief distinguishing characters are tersely presented in simple terms, the usual mass of technical description being properly avoided. To the uninitiated it may seem surprising that there are 108 species of trees known to be native to the state (exclusive of *Crataegus*), while the presence of eight others is suspected; in addition there are ten species of large shrubs that may at times be regarded as trees. The Kentucky Federation of Women's Clubs is to be congratulated on its unusual foresight and good sense in issuing a book of this character and providing for its free distribution within the state; the federation is also to be congratulated for having been able to enlist so capable a person as Mrs. MAURY in the preparation of the volume.—H. C. COWLES.

<sup>2</sup> MAURY, SARAH WEBB, Native trees of Kentucky, a handbook. pp. 140. figs. 47. Louisville: published by the Kentucky Federation of Women's Clubs. 1910. \$1.00. (Copies may be obtained from Mrs. H. C. Muir, Nicholasville, Ky.)